



VETERANS SERVICES DIVISION

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Fact Sheet

Depleted Uranium

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Depleted Uranium (DU) is a by-product of the process by which uranium is enriched to produce reactor fuel and nuclear weapons components. The leftover uranium, 40% less radioactive than natural uranium, is called "depleted uranium," or DU.

DU is currently the weapon of choice on the battlefield against enemy armor due to its penetrating power and self-sharpening ability. DU is used on Abrams Main Battle Tanks, its armor reinforced by a layer of DU sandwiched between two layers of steel.

DU is a heavy metal that is also slightly radioactive. Heavy metals (uranium, lead, tungsten, etc.) have chemical toxicity properties that, in high doses, can cause adverse health effects, primarily to the kidneys. DU does not significantly add to the background radiation that we encounter every day.

To safeguard the health of California veterans and eligible members, the California Department of Veterans Affairs will assist California veterans and eligible members in obtaining Federal health services, including best practice screening tests capable of detecting low levels of DU.

If you are a veteran who served in a combat zone after 1990 or in an area that DU was used, you may have been exposed. DU exposure has been divided into three categories:

1. Level I – personnel who were in, on or near combat vehicles when they were struck by DU rounds, or entered immediately after to attempt rescue.
2. Level II – personnel who routinely entered DU damaged vehicles, or fought fires involving DU munitions.
3. Level III – personnel involved in all other DU exposures.

All United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health facilities must provide DU screening examinations to any veteran who feels they may have been exposed. This may include a bioassay (24-hour urine test measuring exposure to natural and depleted uranium).

DU bioassays are required for all personnel with Level I and II exposures. For Level III, DU bioassays are not required, but medical providers may provide a bioassay for medical management or at the request of the individual. All personnel in Level I and II exposure categories will be referred to the Baltimore Veterans Administration DU Medical Follow-up Program (1.800.815.7533).

If you believe you may have been exposed to DU, contact your VA primary care provider. For information on any of your veterans benefits, contact your local County Veteran Services Officer at www.cacvso.org.

For more information on DU, please visit the following websites:
Argonne National Laboratory - www.ead.anl.gov/pub/doc/u-depleted.pdf